

# The Web is Wider



Civic Engagement Innovation Fund  
Stand Up For Our Children: Year One Evaluation  
November, 2013



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & KEY FINDINGS**

Stand Up for Our Children (Stand Up) is a grant initiative of the Greater New Orleans Foundation (GNOF), made possible through funding by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation Civic Engagement Innovation Fund (Kellogg), to support the work of organizations in New Orleans focused on engaging parents of children between the ages of zero and five. This initiative is based on a belief (shared by both GNOF and Kellogg) that solutions to community issues and problems emanate from local citizens working individually and collectively toward the common good and that people have the inherent capacity to solve their own problems.

In turn, Stand Up empowers parents/families in the community to improve the conditions facing the region's most vulnerable children. This initiative funds nonprofit organizations committed to inclusion, innovation, and impact in solving systemic early childhood problems through engagement by parents/families and others in the community through dialogue, issue identification, leadership development, collaboration, data driven planning and community mobilization.

The expected outcome of this initiative is two-fold:

- More engaged parents advocating for vulnerable children 0-5 years old, and
- Strengthened nonprofits through organizational capacity building

The support provided to the organizations participating in this initiative include grant funding and capacity building via (1) coaching/technical assistance and (2) participation in a Community of Practice (CoP) where members of the organizations were provided a platform for sharing and learning from one another. Each funded organization designed and implemented program and activities focused on increasing parent engagement and understanding how to use data in making decisions affecting children centered on one or more of the following areas of work:

- Family Economic Security
- Readiness to Learn among children ages 0-5
- Healthy Birth Weights

The original objective of the Year One evaluation of the Stand Up for Our Children initiative was to assess:

- to what extent participation in the Stand Up initiative yielded an increase in the capacity of parents to be leaders, and
- whether there was an increase in the funded organization's capacity to engage parents.

During the development phase of the initiative, GNOF staff determined there were capacity needs in the field, particularly for grant recipients of the initiative. Successful applicants were required to participate in a Community of Practice designed to address these needs over time. Therefore, a third objective of the Year One evaluation was added:

- To assess the influence of the community of practice approach to promoting collaboration and learning among participants.

During the first year of this initiative, Stand Up funded organizations participated in a series of seven meetings occurring between October 2012 and July 2013. These meetings were structured and consisted of strengthening participant's learning around evaluation, logic model design, engaging parents as leaders, community mapping, social media, and program planning and implementation.

This evaluation was guided by the following questions:

- How or to what extent have Stand Up funded organizations increased their capacity to engage parents of children ages 0-5?
- How or to what extent have parents participating in Stand Up increased their capacity to advocate for their children ages 0-5?
- To what extent did participation in the Community of Practice foster collaboration and learning from one another?

Data was collected and synthesized from observations of the Community of Practice and parent meetings; focus groups with CoP members; telephone interviews with parents; surveys of parents; and surveys of CoP participants.

# **KEY FINDINGS**

The following are the high-level themes and findings relating to this evaluation.

*Evaluation Question #1: How or to what extent have Stand Up funded organizations increased their capacity to engage parents of children ages 0-5?*

- 1. Increased organizational capacity of nonprofits engaged in funded Stand Up work:**
  - Awareness of importance of parent voice
  - Skills acquisition
  - Organizations and staff are reframing their approaches to parent engagement.
  - Learning and experience from the Stand Up initiative is triggering internal organization questions about fundamental values and approaches
  - Organizations and staff are reframing their approaches to parent engagement
- 2. Increased understanding and use of key data:**
  - Awareness of data like EDI, census and others
- 3. Increased use and implementation of promising/evidence based practices in engaging parents/families:**
  - Inclusion of promising/evidence based practices in engaging parents/families

*Evaluation Question #2: How or to what extent have parents participating in Stand Up increased their capacity to advocate for their children ages 0-5?*

- 1. Increased personal sense of agency among parent advocates:**
  - Awareness of civics and democratic processes
  - Awareness of parent rights
  - Increase in knowledge and skills.
  - More confidence and motivation to lead.
  - Rise in self-belief about influencing change.
  - Heightened awareness of parents' rights.
  - More motivation to be engaged.
  - Bolstered belief in ability to make change.
- 2. Increased understanding and use of key data**
- 3. Further development of early childhood and parent/families, community organizing and advocacy alliances and coalitions**

*Evaluation Question #3: To what extent did participation in the Community of Practice foster collaboration and learning from one another?*

- 1. Further development of early childhood and parent/families community organizing and advocacy alliances and coalitions:**
  - Coordination among CoP members and other organizations
- 2. Increased sharing of promising practices of parent engagement with other organizations**
- 3. Seeking each other out for support and problem solving**

# **INTRODUCTION**

*Stand Up For Our Children* is a W.K. Kellogg Foundation grant funded initiative to foster civic participation and empower our parents /families to improve the quality of life for our region's most vulnerable children.

A fundamental belief of both the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (Kellogg) and the Greater New Orleans Foundation (GNOF) is that solutions to community problems emanate from local citizens working individually and collectively toward the common good and that people have the inherent capacity to solve their own problems. In turn, Stand Up For Our Children (Stand Up) empowers parents/families in the community to improve the conditions facing our region's most vulnerable children. This initiative funded nonprofit organizations committed to inclusion, innovation, and impact in solving systemic early childhood problems through engagement by parents/families and others in the community through dialogue, issue identification, leadership development, collaboration, data driven planning and community mobilization.

## **Grant Approach and Development**

### *Planning Phase (September 2010 – May 2011)*

A \$1.5 million dollar W. K. Kellogg grant was received by GNOF in the fall of 2010. An advisory committee was established to assist in the design of the initiative, comprised of seven members and balancing factors such as race, gender, sector (nonprofit, business, government, etc.).

GNOF program staff determined that to achieve the rigorous and important outcomes of the grant, the capacity of prospective grantees had to be built before grants could be awarded.

### *Implementation Phase (Mid-summer, 2011 – present)*

Leadership for the Stand Up grant was transferred from GNOF Programs to Organizational Effectiveness (OE) in mid-summer 2011 under the direction of Joann Ricci, Vice President of OE. During this Implementation Phase, GNOF focused on two outcomes:

- More engaged parents advocating for vulnerable children 0-5 years old
- Strengthened nonprofits through organizational capacity building

Flint Mitchell, Program Officer and Joann Ricci, Vice President of Organizational Effectiveness of GNOF undertook additional planning and determined that a proactive grant making approach would be the most efficient and effective way of



engaging nonprofits. This decision was based on the preliminary advisory committee work, additional data gleaned from the community, prior staff insights about the nonprofits in the sector, and conversations with key civic engagement leaders and early childhood practitioners.

By March 2012, staff identified and convened approximately thirty-five nonprofit organizations which were recognized as key providers in the early childhood and/or civic engagement arena and led them through a half-day meeting to map the services currently provided, assess the needs of the sector, and introduce participants to the Stand Up for Our Children initiative and appraise their capacity to fulfill the intent of the grant.

Through this effort, the capacity needs of the field were identified, and it was determined that additional training and consulting expertise were needed to address gaps in early childhood service provision and parental engagement to ensure the applications and programs funded deliver the outcomes of the Kellogg grant.

Using the data collected from the March gathering and prior capacity building insights into the needs of the organizations, coupled with Flint Mitchell's due diligence, site visits, and feedback from other GNOF staff, board, and local funders, GNOF narrowed the list of potential applicants from the original thirty-five to twelve and invited senior level staff of these prospective applicants to a day-long training in early June.

This session, led by nationally-recognized early childhood and parent leadership experts from the Connecticut Commission on Children and the award-winning Parent Leadership Training Institute, provided attending grantees insight into promising practices in parent engagement, especially those with children between the ages of zero and five. Participation was a prerequisite for submitting a Letter of Intent (LOI) and moving forward in the Stand Up grant process.

Invitations to apply for a full grant went to eleven organizations, each of which were eligible for up to three hours of program and grant consultation from two local consultants who will continue to assist with the learning cohort and evaluation process. One organization declined to submit an application.

After careful and extensive review, ten organizations were provided funding in August 2012 (one organization withdrew from consideration during the review process). The first year Stand Up grant cohort includes:

## **City of NOLA Health Dept - Healthy Start NOLA\***

Healthy Start is a fetal and infant mortality reduction program serving the City's most vulnerable citizens: those who are economically disadvantaged and at increased risk for negative birth outcomes. Healthy Start's Stand Up area of focus was Healthy Birth Weights.

## **Louisiana Children's Museum (LCM)**

LCM's mission is to promote hands-on participatory learning for children of all ages. Encouraging discovery through observation, inquiry, creative construction, role-playing, problem-solving and free play, the Museum motivates children to develop their cognitive, physical and social skills while enjoying fruitful interaction with adults and peers. LCM chose focus on the Ready to Learn goal of Stand Up.

## **Neighborhoods Partnership Network (NPN)**

NPN serves the New Orleans community in the areas of community/civic engagement and makes available the expertise of its network to a wide range of community efforts. NPN is committed to using proven community mobilization approaches that produce positive, healthy results for New Orleans neighborhoods and strengthen civil society by building greater community participation, commitment, and capacity. NPN's Stand Up area of focus was Family and Economic Security and Ready to Learn.

## **Birthing Project USA, Delta Region Office (Birthing Project)\***

Birthing Project pairs expecting mothers with a partner to provide support to expectant mothers during their pregnancy and encourage delivery of a healthy baby. This partnership, referred to as the "Little Sister/Sister Friend Model," has achieved success internationally. The Birthing Project chose to expand on this model to address the Healthy Birth Weights.

## **Orleans Public Education Network (OPEN)**

OPEN is committed to ensuring that there is an informed and engaged community that exercises influence on policy and programs to realize excellence and equity for every child in public schools in New Orleans. OPEN's focus was broadly centered on parent leadership.

## **Planned Parenthood Gulf Coast (Planned Parenthood)\***

Planned Parenthood serves as a provider of reproductive health care, sexuality education and advocacy for reproductive rights. Planned Parenthood addressed the Healthy Birth Weight goal of Stand Up.

## **Puentes New Orleans (Puentes)**

Puentes serves to build assets and create access for and with Latinos of the Greater New Orleans area through civic engagement, leadership development, economic asset building, policy and advocacy. Puentes focused on the Ready to Learn goal of Stand Up.

## **Total Community Action (TCA)**

TCA seeks to move families toward self sufficiency and addresses the needs of the poor and near-poor by providing direct assistance and the opportunity for people to better help themselves. TCA directed their Stand Up work towards the goals of Family and Economic Security and Ready to Learn.

## **United Way of Southeast Louisiana\*\***

United Way of Southeast Louisiana's mission is to increase the organized capacity of people to be independent and self-sufficient. United way of Southeast Louisiana executes this mission through service to citizens residing within a seven parish area. United Way of Southeast Louisiana addressed the Ready to Learn Goal of Stand Up.

## **Urban League of Greater New Orleans (Urban League)**

The Urban League of Greater New Orleans engages in activities focused on three major areas: Youth and Education; Community and Economic Development and Policy and Social Justice. The Urban League of Greater New Orleans directed its Stand Up funded work to address the Ready to Learn goal.

*\*It is important to note following the pre-grant application convening session that Healthy Start, Birthing Project and Planned Parenthood decided to enter into a partnership to address their shared focus of Healthy Birth Weights and indicated this partnership in their grant application.*

*\*\* United Way's grant funded work did not involve direct involvement with engaging parents.*

## **Community of Practice (CoP)**

Through this grantmaking process, staff assessed the capacity needs of the field and concluded that additional training and consulting expertise were needed to address gaps in early childhood service provision and parental engagement. Therefore, as part of this effort, GNOF offered ongoing, structured learning experiences to further educate grantees about early childhood and organizational capacity best practices including evaluation.

To that end, successful grant applicants have been required to participate in a Community of Practice (CoP) managed by GNOF's OE staff and consultants. A CoP is a group of practitioners dedicated to learning with and from one another in pursuit of promising organizational and programmatic practices that support meeting the mission driven work of the nonprofit. CoPs recognize how knowledge and learning get transferred, developed, and evolved by those doing the work. The objective of the CoP's efforts is to gain greater insight on areas related to the implementation of the Stand Up funded projects, to foster collaboration and shared learning, and encourage problem solving among participant organizations.

GNOF provided each of these organizations the opportunity to build their capacity through the grant application process and post-grant award period by providing the following organizational and programmatic development opportunities:

- Supplied pre-grant application consultation, via experienced non-profit consultants, that assisted organizations with developing a strong grant application.
- Post-award consultation, with an experienced non-profit consultant, centered on needs in the areas of program development, evaluation planning and logic model design.
- Capacity building via the CoP meetings that focused on organizational and program development issues, and content matters related to the goals of the Stand Up initiative.
- Capacity building via grantee participation on the CoP design team. The design team met frequently to debrief after CoP meetings and plan the objectives of the next gathering.
- Capacity building via the modeling of evaluation planning activities by the evaluation consultant and key GNOF staff. These opportunities were visible during focus groups and the final CoP meeting where grantees responded to preliminary themes drawn from the focus groups they participated in.
- Peer-to-Peer learning opportunities to share parent engagement practices and other promising management, social media, evaluation, and leadership practices across organizations.
- Access to national experts in parent engagement and leadership.

CoP members met seven times from October 2012 to July 2013, and GNOF continues to organize regular convenings of the participants. To garner optimal participation in the CoP meetings, GNOF required that both a member of the grant recipient's program staff and a high level staff person- also referred to as a "Decision Maker" - attend all meetings.

The meetings of the CoP thus far have considered these learning opportunities:

- Understanding commonalities and identifying priorities;
- Identifying successes and challenges for the CoP funded organization in implementation of grants across grant-funded work;
- Using evaluation to document successes, and areas of improvement and learning;
- Data collection and assessment;
- Developing logic models;
- Authentic parent engagement and recruitment strategies;
- Developing a policy agenda; and
- Social media to engage parents.

### **Evaluation Audience and Utility**

The objectives of the Year One evaluation of the Stand Up for Our Children initiative were to assess:

- To what extent participation in the Stand Up initiative yielded an increase in the capacity of parents to be leaders, and
- Whether there was an increase in the funded organization's capacity to engage parents.
- To assess the influence of the community of practice approach to promoting collaboration and learning among participants.

Findings from this Year One evaluation will be shared with the Kellogg Foundation, other local and national foundations, and utilized by GNOF and the CoP participants to plan and fine-tune Year Two of the Stand Up initiative.

### **Evaluation Questions**

The Year One evaluation of this initiative was guided by the following questions:

- How or to what extent have Stand Up funded organizations increased their capacity to engage parents of children ages 0-5?
- How or to what extent have parents participating in Stand Up increased their capacity to advocate for their children ages 0-5?
- To what extent did participation in the Community of Practice foster collaboration and learning from one another?

# METHODOLOGY

## Design

This evaluation consisted of a cluster evaluation utilizing a post-test/implementation One Group Design. This design was chosen based on appropriateness to the project and context and involved quantitative and qualitative measures. Data in the form of surveys, focus groups and observations was collected to answer the evaluation questions. **Table 1** provides a description of the data collection methods used for each of the evaluation questions.

Increased Organizational Capacity	Increased Parent Capacity	Community of Practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Survey</li><li>• Observation</li><li>• Focus Group</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Survey</li><li>• Observation</li><li>• Interview</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Survey</li><li>• Observation</li><li>• Focus Group</li></ul>

**Table 1: Each evaluation collected data via surveys and observation.**

## Survey Instrumentation

For the purposes of this evaluation, two survey instruments were designed to collect pertinent information from parents and CoP members (See Attachments 2 and 3).

The parent survey include questions related to skill acquisition, awareness of confidence in parent leadership abilities and awareness of child relevant data sources, interpretation of data and data usages/applications.

For CoP members the survey included questions related to skill acquisition, collaboration with other members outside of the CoP and progress towards organizational changes needed to promote parent advocacy and an engagement model. Feedback for development of each survey was obtained by key members of the Organizational Effectiveness staff at GNOF. In addition, the parent survey was shared with Stand Up grantees and their feedback was obtained and incorporated in the final draft of the survey.

Each grantee administered the survey to their parents and submitted the completed surveys to the evaluator. A total of 44 parents were surveyed. The CoP member survey was administered via Survey Monkey to 14 participants.

## **Focus Groups**

Data was collected via focus group to ascertain greater depth to the questions asked in the survey and to obtain information regarding unintended outcomes, if any. Two focus groups (See Attachments 4 and 5) were held with CoP members to obtain greater insight into the extent to which they experienced a transformation in their practice and the extent to which changes in organizational capacity to engage parents had occurred.

## **Parent Interviews**

To discern a greater understanding of parent transformation related to Stand Up, telephone interviews were held with six parents who had participated in a Stand Up funded initiative (See Attachment 5). The original evaluation plan called for two parent focus groups. However, challenges with coordinating parent schedules, and barriers to participation such as transportation, interviews were held in lieu of the two focus groups.

## **Observations**

Notes from observations from select CoP meetings and parent meetings were recorded (See Attachment 6 ). (A limitation to this evaluation study is evident in observation opportunities. At the time of data collection many of the parent meetings had either ended or had yet to begin. This scheduling issue reduced the number of observation opportunities. Further discussion on this can be found in the Recommendations section of the report.)

## **Data Entry and Analysis**

Data obtained from closed ended questions on all surveys (Parents and CoP Members) were analyzed and frequencies and percentages were calculated. Focus groups were recorded using two tape recorders for each session. These tapes were transcribed verbatim and reviewed twice for accuracy in transcription. Data obtained from observations, interviews and focus groups were coded and reoccurring themes were recorded. Responses to the open ended survey questions, focus groups and parent interviews were analyzed for similarities and subject matter. These themes as well as supporting statements are reported in this document.

# **FINDINGS**

The evaluation of this initiative was guided by the following questions:

- How or to what extent have Stand Up funded organizations increased their capacity to engage parents of children ages 0-5?
- How or to what extent have parents participating in Stand Up increased their capacity to advocate for their children ages 0-5?
- To what extent did participation in the Community of Practice foster collaboration and learning from one another?

The findings outlined in this report are the results of the analysis and synthesis of the collected evaluation data. These findings are presented in this report via tables, thematic display and narratives.

## ***Evaluation Question #1: How or to what extent have Stand Up funded organizations increased their capacity to engage parents of children ages 0-5?***

A key component of the Year One Stand Up for Our Children initiative included a proactive, competitive grantmaking approach that resulted in ten organizations being funded. Through this grantmaking process, staff determined the capacity needs of the field and concluded that additional training and consulting expertise was needed to address gaps in early childhood service provision and parental engagement to ensure the applications and programs funded deliver the outcomes of the Kellogg grant.

It was additionally recognized that post-award, the Foundation would offer ongoing, structured learning experiences to further build capacity around early childhood and organizational best practices including evaluation. To that end, successful grant applicants have been required to participate in the Community of Practice (CoP) that has met regularly over the course of the past 14 months. These facilitated sessions, often with content-related presentations, provided a venue for cross-sectoral and experiential learning as grantee organizations compared notes in real time about their work.

These funded organizations in the Stand Up for Our Children initiative serve as the on-the-ground vehicles working to build the capacity of low-income people and community-based organizations in developing an early childhood policy agenda.

The success of the individual organizations in their work with parents is significantly influenced by whether their own capacity has increased to engage parents. The Year

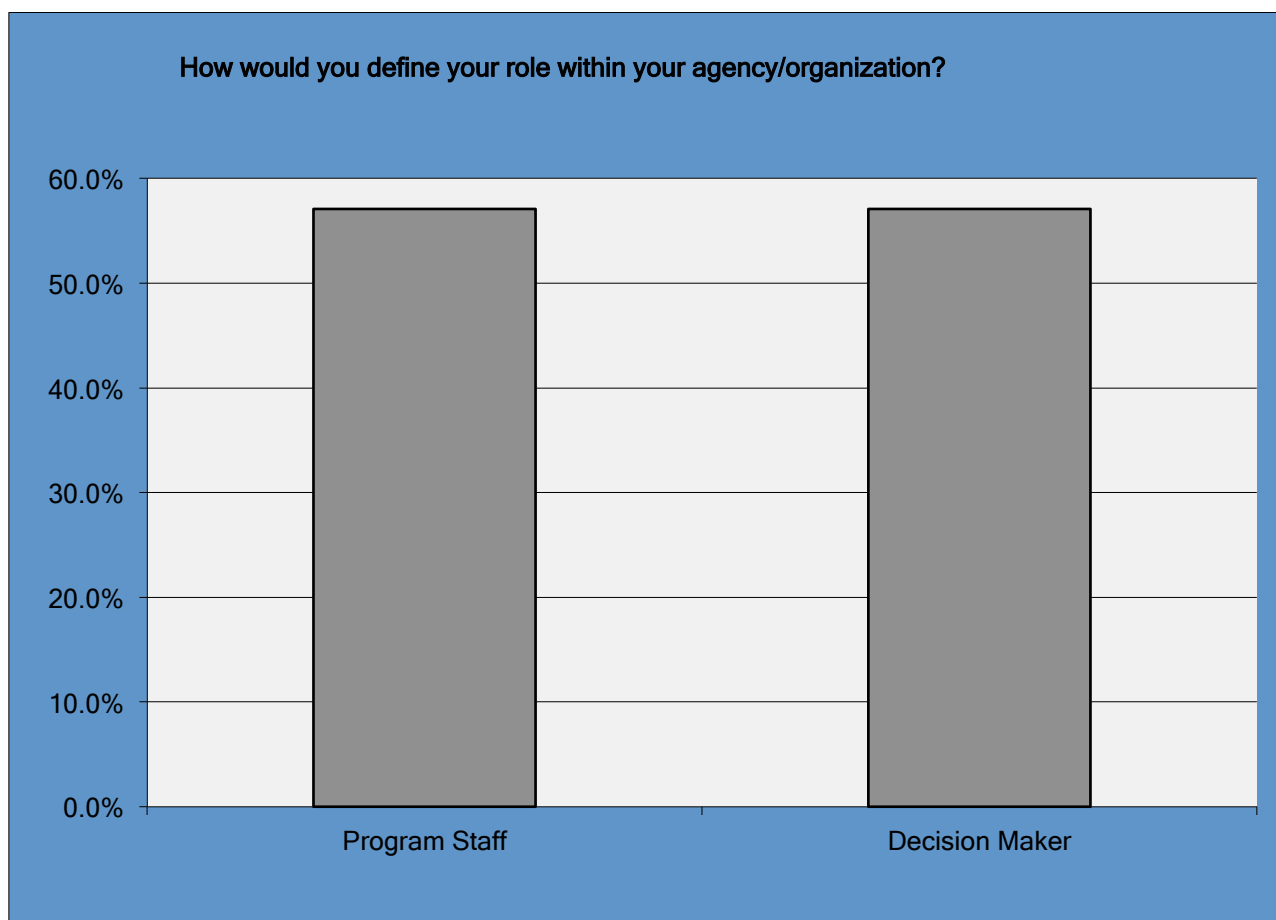


One evaluation considered three organizational outcome indicators to learn more about the increased capacity for engaging parents.

**1. Increased organizational capacity of nonprofits engaged in funded Stand Up work**

- **Increased awareness of importance of parent voice**
- **Increased skill acquisition**

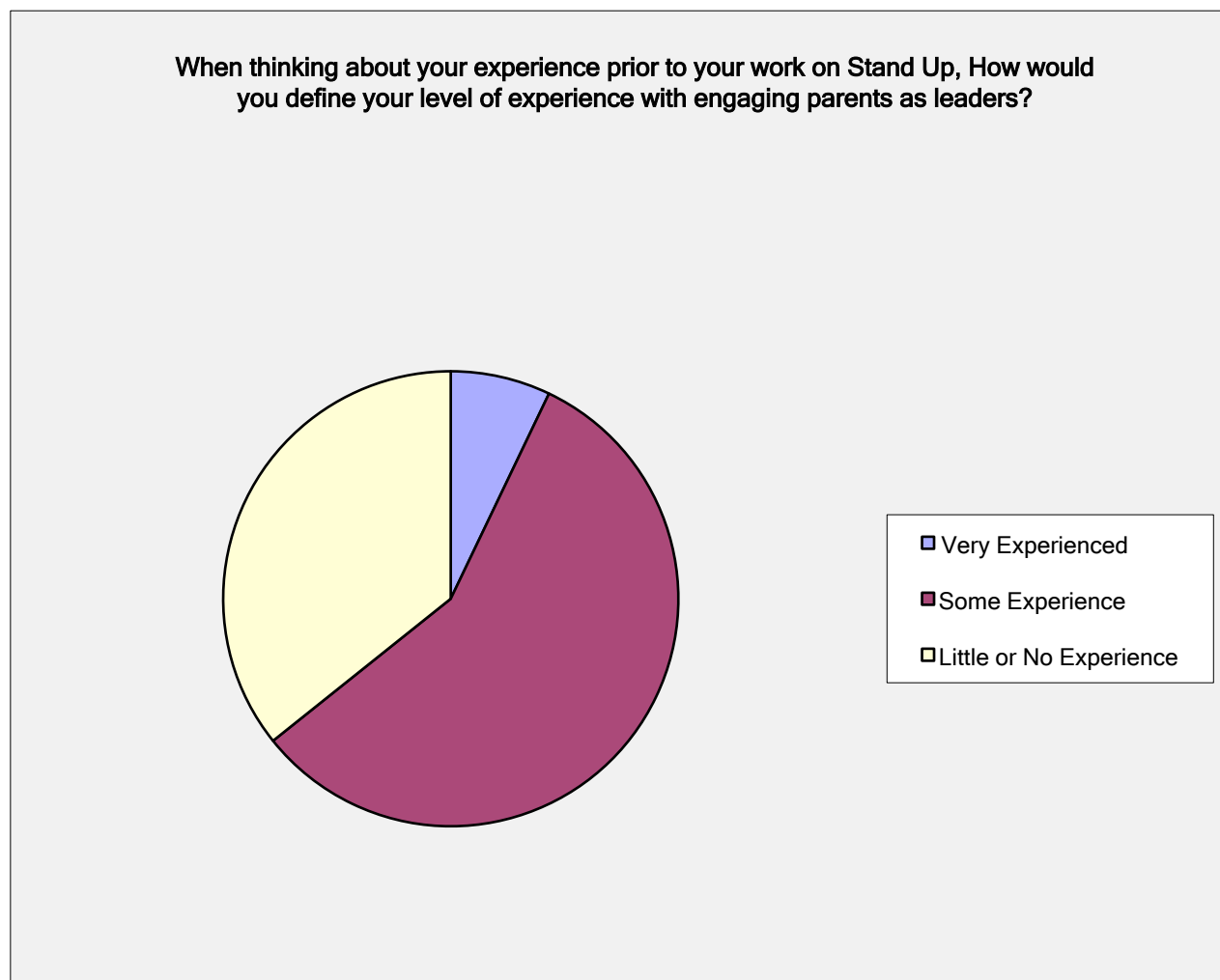
In a survey of participants in the Stand Up for Our Children Community of Practice, half describe themselves as Program Staff and half describe themselves as Decision Makers in their respective organizations (See **Chart 1** below).



**Chart 1: About 57% of respondents identified themselves as decisions makers at their organizations.**

N=14

It is important to highlight that the majority of participants in the Community of Practice had only some experience with engaging parents as leaders (57.1%) or little or no experience (35.7%) in such work with parents prior to their participation in Stand Up for Our Children. There were only 7.1% of participants who describe themselves as very experienced in engaging parents as leaders. (See **Chart 2** below).



**Chart 2: The majority of respondents reported that they had some experience engaging parents as leaders.**

N=14

Given this baseline in experience, Stand Up for Our Children is having a positive impact on CoP members. In **Table 1a** (below), 85.7% of participants report an increased awareness of the importance of parent voice, and 71.4% report an increase in their knowledge of the concerns of parents regarding their children.

How has your participation in the Stand Up Learning Community affected the following:			
Answer Options	Increased	Decreased	No Change
My awareness of the importance of parent voice	85.7%	--	14.2 %
My knowledge of the concerns of parents regarding their children	71.4%	--	28.5 %

**Table 1a: The majority of respondents reported their awareness of the parent voice increased as a result of their participation in the CoP.**

N=14

CoP members also credit their participation in Stand Up for Our Children as having a positive effect on their own capacity. Over 85% stated they have increased capacity in engaging parents meaningfully, and over 70% report an increased capacity in parent recruitment strategies (See **Table 1b**).

How has your participation in the Stand Up Learning Community affected your capacity in the following areas:			
Answer Options	Increased	Decreased	No Change
Engaging Parents Meaningfully	85.7 %	--	14.2 %
Parent Recruitment Strategies	71.4 %	--	28.5 %

**Table 1b: The majority of respondents reported their capacity of meaningfully engage parents increased as a result of their participation in the CoP.**

N=14

Planned Parenthood, for example, developed a parent resource guide to support the organization's work with parents, and it also had immediate impact on some parents. One parent, who was pregnant, used the guide to learn she wasn't getting her needs met by her current physician and thus changed her medical doctor.

Another example of change occurred when Puentes learned that Latino families in Jefferson Parish were unable to enroll their children in Head Start due to documentation requirements (i.e., valid Louisiana ID). Puentes engaged the Southern Poverty Law Center who surfaced the issue with the Jefferson Parish Head Start, and Head Start changed their policy as a result of this engagement. Other examples of increased and more meaningful parent engagement include:

- A letter-writing campaign to legislators initiated by the mothers in the Birthing Project regarding the impact of the Fall 2013 government shutdown on WIC and their families. A total of 10 mothers participated.
- The Urban League Pride parent graduates formed their own alumni session. As Urban League staff was unavailable to coordinate this meeting, the parents undertook that role on their own.
- A parent involved with Total Community Action was featured in the Wall Street Journal for her advocacy efforts regarding school choice (See Attachment 8), and the agency eventually hired this same parent to work with them.

Participation in the Stand Up for Our Children CoP also resulted in increased skills acquisition for grant-funded organizations. **Table 1c** (below) demonstrates the majority of participants report an increase in capacity around program planning and implementation, logic model development, evaluation, and partnerships. Only in the topic of curriculum development do a majority of respondents (57.1%) report no change in capacity. This may be due to the variety of program approaches utilized by individual organizations and/or differing definitions of curriculum.

<b>How has your participation in the Stand Up Learning Community affected your capacity in the following areas:</b>			
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Increased</b>	<b>Decreased</b>	<b>No Change</b>
Negotiating and Managing partnerships	<b>85.7 %</b>	--	14.2 %
Program Planning	<b>92.8 %</b>	--	7.1%
Program Implementation	<b>71.4 %</b>	--	28.5 %
Logic Model Development	<b>92.8 %</b>	--	7.1%
Evaluation Planning	<b>85.7 %</b>	--	14.2 %
Determining Evaluation Indicators	<b>78.5 %</b>	--	21.4 %
Curriculum Development	<b>42.8 %</b>	--	57.1 %

**Table 1c: The majority of respondents reported that participation in the CoP increased their capacity in six of the seven areas surveyed.**

N=14

Looking deeper at changes experienced by the CoP cohort as a result of participation in Stand Up for Our Children, two major themes emerge that impact organizational

capacity building – both in positive ways and both with promise for long-term improvement in practice:

- **Organizations and staff are reframing their approaches to parent engagement.**
- **Learning and experience from the Stand Up initiative is triggering internal organization questions about fundamental values and approaches**
- **Organizations and staff are reframing their approaches to parent engagement**

Over half of CoP participants (57.1%) report an increase in the influence parents had on organizational policies and procedures, and an even more substantial majority (85.7%) state an increase in their organization’s utilization of a civics-based approach to parent engagement (See **Table 1d** below).

<b>How has your participation in the Stand Up Learning affected the following for your agency/organization:</b>			
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Increased</b>	<b>Decreased</b>	<b>No Change</b>
The influence parents had on organizational policies and procedures	<b>57.1%</b>	--	42.8 %
Your organization’s utilization of a civics based approach to parent engagement	<b>85.7%</b>	--	14.2 %

**Table 1d: The majority of respondents reported increased parent influence as a result of the organization’s participation in the CoP.**

N=14

Participants offer a spectrum of examples of how they as individual staff and how their respective organizations are reframing their approaches and exploring how to become more effective in parent engagement. A number of CoP participants shared similar experiences about their typical program approach – that is, engaging parents in a group setting. For different reasons (reduced attendance, parent feedback, etc.), they each moved to working with parents on a one-on-one basis.

- *“But what I was finding was when we polled them (parents) one-on-one, they were more apt to be honest and hope about whatever they needed to say. We do find that individual, one-on-one type settings work a little better.”*

- *“We found that people just weren’t coming to the groups. So we’ve had a lot more success...sort of just building these personal relationships...and letting parents sort of guide us rather than we guiding them.”*
- *“When you just kind of pull one person aside, we also got a lot out of that, a lot of personal connection and a deeper feeling of what issues they were dealing with.”*

Other CoP members utilized listening sessions, focus groups and other techniques to engage parents and identify key issues of concern, but with mixed results. One participant shared, *“I don’t think any parents...came out of self-identifying as leaders and I think it kind of made us go back to the drawing board. What can we do to reach them?”* Another organization said of their experience, *“in every single focus group...at least one parent said – ‘so how do we fix this?’”* That group used such openings to guide parents into their civic engagement training as follow-up.

One participant perhaps distilled these changes to their core. *“For me, it’s relationship building. Just learning a lot about how important it is...I am a lot more aware about how important it is to build relationships with parents and adults as you do this kind of education and community organizing. I didn’t realize how little capacity we had for this kind of education that we do...especially parent education.”*

Finally, another member acknowledged, *“thinking that because we provide food, transportation, even child care that that’s going to make them (parents) more interested in being part of the group. That’s just not the case. That’s removing barriers; that’s not the answer at times. It’s easy to get them engaged. It’s how to ‘keep’ them engaged is where the challenge is.”*

It is apparent that participation in the Stand Up initiative is instigating thoughtful inquiries among some CoP members about how their respective organizations position their work in the community. These inquiries might be viewed as ripples emanating from the core work of Stand Up and reverberating in a larger organizational context that could stimulate substantive, long-term change in how these organizations operate.

One participant shared, *“we changed our definition of ‘advocacy’ as we were presenting it, because we realized that we saying things like, ‘oh well, you can’t get in front of Congress.’ But there were much smaller things that were much better examples of advocacy that we’ve already done...if you went to a PTA meeting and said this is not right for your child, you’ve advocated on behalf of your child.”*

Another participant stated, *“I felt a different charge to really empower parents instead of really enabling parents. I brought that back to my agency and challenged even our staff, ‘Are we really helping or are we contributing to these same issues to being issues forever?’ We started to change the attitude of the staff.”*

Other CoP members talk of similar profound changes being considered in their organizations' efforts:

- *“I would say for us...having a paradigm shift from ‘systems thinking,’ which is how I was professionally trained and my colleagues were trained to making connections within systems to support better outcomes, whatever they may be, to really thinking of using ‘civics thinking’ so really developing the relationships with the parents and helping equip parents with the skills to be the ones to start to change the system and it was quite a struggle, just being honest.”*
- *“I think previously we’ve never had a specific target population, so engagement has been whosoever is interested, whosoever comes to us and this is the first time we said, ‘we need this particular group of folk.’ ” And so crafting a strategy to engage a particular group of folks has been a good skill to have that we can apply to other endeavors.”*
- *“We think for the first few months of this program (‘Undoing Racism’) it was really about, ‘ok, outreach, set up a meeting!’ and ‘quickly, through that training,’ And just through deeper conversations, we realized this is not how you create long-term relationships and both between parents and between our organization and parents, and just deepen connections within the neighborhood. It’s really transformed the way we were even thinking about the program. It definitely slowed the initial goals down but, I think it was setting us up for more long term success that if we had kept going on that original path and just check off items on a task list.”*
- *“(Stand Up) created a pretty significant change because we hadn’t done any parent engagement at all...it wasn’t part of the mission. Suddenly, there is an entirely new branch of the organization which has had, I think, some really positive impact. The learning collaborative, that insist on the connections and partnerships is very much in step with our mission statement, if not our practice at this point.”*

## **2. Increased understanding and use of key data**

### **○ Increased awareness of data like EDI, census and others**

By a wide margin, most CoP participants (78.5%) report their engagement has increased their awareness of data such as EDI, census and other sources (See **Table 1e** below).

How has your participation in the Stand Up Learning Community affected the following:			
Answer Options	Increased	Decreased	No Change
My awareness of data like EDI, census and others	78.5%	--	21.4 %

**Table 1e: The majority of respondents reported their awareness of data increased as a result of participation in the CoP.**

N=14

And most respondents (71.4%) report their participation increased the usage of data like EDI, census or others to frame their organization's agenda/activities (See **Table 1f** below).

How has your participation in the Stand Up Learning affected the following for your agency/organization:			
Answer Options	Increased	Decreased	No Change
Usage of data like EDI, census or others to frame the organization's agenda/activities	71.4%	--	28.5 %

**Table 1f: 71% of respondents reported their usage of data increased as a result of participation in the CoP.**

N=14

This increased awareness led to the actual use of data for engaging parents and providing them more powerful information and tools to utilize in their advocacy efforts. A CoP participant told of how their organization uses a parents' session on "Understanding Data:"

*"We used how the grade schools, in various school systems and what letter grades meant and how do you apply to get into these various schools...you know, understand how EDI works....what are some of the gaps, how do they work in their own independent neighborhoods what they were seeing. At that point, I think I saw them (parents) change. They began to take an active role in what we were teaching because they became more 'application based.' "*

Another participant observed, *"the biggest change that I saw in our parents as a result of not just learning about data and taking the courses, was that their self-confidence level was higher. I think when you feel like you have something to back you up, you have that information, you have that knowledge and you know what to do and you've applied it in the workshops as well – so you know that you can do it."*



And yet another CoP member notes another way data has become important to parents' advocacy efforts:

*“They (parents) didn’t realize things they use data for an everyday, ordinary daily basis, just everyday ordinary things like shopping....they started there and then they moved into other areas where we use data on a regular basis. We talked about data you would need to collect when you’re doing community actions, projects. The parents had a lot of comments...that they were learning about the different things that a part of being an advocate or being a part of parent leadership.”*

### 3. Increased use and implementation of promising/evidence based practices in engaging parents/families

- Increased inclusion of promising/evidence based practices in engaging parents/families

Almost the entire cohort of CoP members (92.8%) stated that their participation has increased their use and implementation of promising/evidence based practices/tools for engaging parents (See **Table 1g** below).

How has your participation in the Stand Up Learning Community affected the following:			
Answer Options	Increased	Decreased	No Change
My use and implementation of promising/evidence based practices/tools for engaging parents	92.8%	--	7.1%

**Table 1g: Over 92% of respondents reported their implementation of evidence based practices increased as a result of participation in the CoP.**

N=14

A number of CoP participants began incorporating logic models (See Attachment 1) into their programmatic efforts, and several reported this learning “spread to other parts” of their respective organizations. One participant shared, *“it highlighted the need to have logic models within our organization. We often...write grants without having a logic model or program document...and I think now we’re better equipped to do the logic models and the indicators and the outcomes. I think is something that is going to help us grow our organization, because now I want to use them to really impact my other staff.”*

Other participants noted the:

- Improved communications as a result of Stand Up’s collaborative meetings and the use of scenarios and role-playing.

- Inclusion of the World Café technique—“*we can use in organizing other meetings to ask questions that matter.*”
- Impact of parent leadership curriculum and instructional videos provided through Stand Up.
- Learning about the use of indicators and asset mapping in program planning

***Evaluation Question #2: How or to what extent have parents participating in Stand Up for Our Children increased their capacity to advocate for their children ages 0-5?***

Stand Up for Our Children is based on the belief that solutions to community problems emanate from local citizens working individually and collectively toward the common good and that people have the inherent capacity to solve their problems. Stand Up is designed to mobilize the parents/families in the community to improve the conditions facing our region’s most vulnerable children.

Assessing the impact of parental participation in Stand Up is a key factor in determining if and how this belief can be manifested in community. Over 350 parents were engaged in some way during Year One of the Stand Up initiative, not including over 775 people that Planned Parenthood had fill out advocacy cards to receive legislative updates. The Year One evaluation considered three parent outcome indicators to learn how or to what extent have parents participating in Stand Up increased their capacity to advocate for their children ages 0-5.

**1. Increased personal sense of agency among parent advocates**

- **Increased awareness of civics and democratic processes**
- **Increased awareness of parent rights**

Having the confidence, knowledge and drive to utilize individual agency is a first step for engaging in community and influencing change.

A significant majority of parents report their participation in Stand Up resulted in increased, positive growth and change in how they see themselves and their roles in their families, neighborhoods and community. One parent succinctly stated, “*I must speak up to be heard.*”

**Table 1a** (below) demonstrates how wide majorities of participants have an increased understanding of the democratic process (81.8%) and an increased awareness it is their right as a parent to be actively involved in issues that affect their child (ren) (88.6%). A participant observed, “*I have the ability to influence my neighborhood by the*

*decisions I make” while another parent shared, “we have rights and we make a difference in our kid’s life.”*

Please share how your participation in parent group meetings has affected the way you see yourself and your role in your family. For each of the following statements, please indicate if it has Increased, Decreased or if there has been No Change. How has your participation in parent groups meetings affected the following:			
Answer Options	Increased	Decreased	No Change
My understanding that it is my right as a parent to be actively involved in issues that affect my child(ren)	88.6 %	--	11.4 %
My ability to see myself as a leader	93.1 %	--	6.9 %
Knowing I can make a difference in my community	95.4 %	2.3 %	2.3 %
My ability to influence community members to take action on important issues	88.4 %	--	11.6 %
Feeling driven to be a leader	88.6 %	--	11.4 %
Feeling personal responsibility to participate in community projects	95.4 %	--	4.6 %
My confidence in myself	88.6 %	--	11.4 %
My understanding of the democratic process	81.8 %	--	18.2 %
My knowledge and skills in bringing about change	97.6 %	--	2.4 %
	93 %	--	7 %

My ability to influence decisions that affect my child			
My ability to influence decisions that affect my family	97.6 %	--	2.4 %

**Table 1a: Respondents indicated their knowledge on all surveyed topics increased as a result of parent group meetings.**

N=44

Participant feedback surfaced other important themes that shed light on the dynamics that influence and support these positive outcomes for parents when asked how program participation affected the way they see themselves and their role in their family:

- **Increase in knowledge and skills.** Over 97 percent of respondents credit the program with increasing their knowledge and skills in bringing about change. An inspired parent talked about how Stand Up *“gives me a higher ladder to climb – they opened the door for me to go to the people that I’ve been wanting to reach.”*

Another participant observed how being in this program, *“helped me to know more about what kind of person I really am. It helped me feel more empowered to handle situations and get access to resources.”* And one parent commented, *“I am more conscious about the things I do with my child, things that I have her exposed to, thinking about the things she eats and how that affects her learning.”*

- **More confidence and motivation to lead.** Just over 93 percent of respondents report an increase in their ability to see themselves as leaders, over 88 percent state an increase in feeling driven to be a leader, and the same amount expressed an increase in self-confidence. One participant said, *“I am more willing to speak up and ask for what I need.”* Another talked about becoming, *“very confident in going to the school and meeting the teachers and going to the school staff to make things better for kids...”* Still another parent says, *“Now I want to fight more for what I want for my kids.”*
- **Rise in self-belief about influencing change.** A total of over 95 percent of respondents feel an increase in their knowledge they can make a difference in their community, over 88 percent report an increase in their ability to influence community members to take action on important issues, 93 percent see an increase in their ability to influence decisions that affect their child, and almost 98 percent told of an increase in their ability to influence decisions that affect their families.

In a sign of fundamental personal change, over 95 percent report an increase in feeling personal responsibility to participate in community projects. In that spirit, parental participation in Stand Up has triggered action by a number of individuals, some as a formal part of their engagement and some informally.

- One parent learned that many failing schools were in need of after-school programs, and undertook research on successful reading programs. This parent applied for a grant for funds to purchase software used in such a reading program and is awaiting approval for the grant.
- Another parent told of how they addressed a situation with their child on a bus. *“I followed the chain of command until it was resolved. I wasn’t going to stop until I got satisfaction.”*
- And another parent told of advocating on behalf of her daughter’s application for an education voucher. *“I was told she was denied and normally I would just accept what people say, but this time I decided to pursue it further.”* This parent was successful in having her daughter’s name placed in the lottery for the scholarship drawing.

When asked about how program participation has changed how parents see their role in their neighborhoods and community, **Table 1b** below highlights similar themes in the positive, increased impact on parents:

- **Heightened awareness of parents’ rights.** More than 95 percent of respondents report an increase in their understanding that it is their right as a parent to be actively involved in issues that affect the children in my community.
- **More motivation to be engaged.** Over 88 percent of parents stated they have an increased desire to be active in their community, and almost 86 percent note an increased motivation to be involved in their community. A participant noted how *“enthused”* they were and talked of their *“increased motivation to do more to volunteer and advocate.”*
- **Bolstered belief in ability to make change.** Almost 86 percent of respondents feel an increase in their ability to influence decisions that affect their neighborhood, almost 91 percent report an increase in knowing they have the ability to change things they like about their community, just over 95 percent see an increase in their ability to influence decisions that affect children in their community, and slightly over 88 percent comment on an increase in their ability to influence decisions that affect their community.

Stand Up was credited by one participant with giving “*us information on how important it is to go out and vote and learn about the people running.*” This same parent goes on to say, “*Now, when people are complaining about what is going on and I ask them, ‘Well, did you go out and vote?’ when they say ‘no’ I say, well, that is the reason why this person is in office.*”

Share how your participation in parent group meetings has affected the way you see your role in your neighborhood and community. For each of the following statements, please indicate if it has Increased, Decreased or if there has been No Change. How has your participation in parent groups meetings affected the following:			
Answer Options	Increased	Decreased	No Change
My ability to influence decisions that affect my neighborhood	85.7 %	--	14.3 %
Knowing I have the ability to change things I don't like about my community	90.7 %	--	9.3 %
My motivation to be involved in my community	85.7 %	--	14.3 %
My desire to be active in my community	88.4 %	--	11.6 %
My ability to influence decisions that affect children in my community	95.3 %	--	3.7 %
My understanding that it is my right as a parent to be actively involved in issues that affect the children in my community	95.3 %	--	4.7 %
My ability to influence decisions that affect my community	88.4 %	--	11.6 %

**Table 1b: The majority of respondents indicated that participation in parent group meetings has increased their feelings impact in their neighborhood and community.**

N=44

## **2. Increased understanding and use of key data.**

Information, statistics, demographics and other data are a critical element in affecting community change. Issues can be framed more effectively, advocacy efforts can be strengthened, and the impact of influence can be heightened. The majority of Stand Up parent participants had an increased awareness of data (ex: EDI, census & others) and its usage.

Over 90 percent of parents report an increase in their knowledge of data related to children (See **Table 1c** below). A participant remarked that learning *“how to look at scores and percentiles – it was awesome.”*

Please share how your participation in parent group meetings has affected the way you see yourself and your role in your family. For each of the following statements, please indicate if it has Increased, Decreased or if there has been No Change. How has your participation in parent groups meetings affected the following:			
Answer Options	Increased	Decreased	No Change
My knowledge of data related to children	90.7 %	--	9.3 %

**Table 1c: Over 90% of respondents indicated that participation in parent group meetings has increased their knowledge of data related to children.**

N=44

A majority (86%) saw an increase in their ability to access information to help better navigate their community, and over 90 percent report an increase in their ability to make sense of data and information about children in their community (See **Table 1d** below). *“(I’ve) learned to pay attention to how the data affects us as a parent,”* noted a respondent.

Share how your participation in parent group meetings has affected the way you see your role in your neighborhood and community... For each of the following statements, please indicate if it has Increased, Decreased or if there has been No Change. How has your participation in parent groups meetings affected the following:			
Answer Options	Increased	Decreased	No Change
My ability to access information to help me better navigate my community	86 %	--	14 %
My ability to make sense of data and information about children in my community	90.7 %	--	9.3 %

**Table 1d: Overwhelmingly, respondents indicated that participation in parent group meetings has increased their ability to make sense of data and information related to children in their community.**

N=44

The increased knowledge of data and how to use it has begun to influence participants' actions. One parent observed, "*After (being) presented the hard data... (it) gave me more of a push to want to go and change those numbers.*" And another participant states they "*now feel empowered to demand services for children.*"

### **3. Further development of early childhood and parent/families, community organizing and advocacy alliances and coalitions**

Finding solutions to community problems also includes local citizens working collectively for the common good. Stand Up participants report by wide majorities positive influence on the sharing of information with other parents.

**Table 1e** (below) shows that over 93 percent report an increase in confidence in their ability to connect with other parents, and that over 97 percent of respondents say they had an increase in sharing of information about programs and resources with other parents.



Please share how your participation in parent group meetings has affected the way you see yourself and your role in your family. For each of the following statements, please indicate if it has Increased, Decreased or if there has been No Change. How has your participation in parent groups meetings affected the following:			
Answer Options	Increased	Decreased	No Change
My confidence in my ability to connect with other parents	93.1 %	--	6.9 %
My sharing of information about programs and resources with other parents	97.6 %	--	2.4 %

**Table 1e: nearly all respondents indicated that participation in parent group meetings has increased their ability to make sense of data and information related to children in their community.**

N=44

A full 100 percent of respondents (See **Table 1f** below) said they would suggest and encourage other parents to participate in parent group meetings like those in Stand Up. Participants value the opportunity to connect with other parents through Stand Up. A parent shared their perspective that *“we all have common experiences”* and another stated, *“The future of our community depends on parental empowerment.”*

Participants also value the change to learn, network, build their skills, and ultimately influence change to benefit their children, neighborhoods and community.

Would you suggest and encourage other parents to participate in parent group meetings like this?	
Answer Options	
Yes	100%
No	0.0 %

**Table 1f: All respondents reported that they would encourage other parents to participate in parent group meetings.**

N=35

*Evaluation Question #3: To what extent did participation in the Community of Practice foster collaboration and learning from one another?*

A key component of the Stand Up for Our Children initiative included a proactive, competitive grantmaking approach that resulted in ten organizations being funded. Through this grantmaking process, staff determined the capacity needs of the field and concluded that additional training and consulting expertise was needed to address gaps in early childhood service provision and parental engagement to ensure the applications and programs funded deliver the outcomes of the Kellogg grant.

It was additionally recognized that post-award the Foundation would offer ongoing, structured learning experiences to further educate grantees about early childhood and organizational capacity best practices including evaluation. To that end, successful grant applicants have been required to participate in the Community of Practice (CoP) that has met regularly over the course of the past 12 months. These facilitated sessions, often with content-related presentations, provided a venue for cross-sectoral and experiential learning as grantee organizations compared notes in real time about their work and resulted in helpful evaluation “artifacts” about the process (See Attachments).

The Year One Evaluation sought to learn to what extent did participation in the CoP foster collaboration and learning from the participants. The evaluation also considered what other progress was made in the further development of early childhood and parent/families community organizing and advocacy alliances and coalitions.

**1) Further development of early childhood and parent/families community organizing and advocacy alliances and coalitions**

**○ Improved coordination among CoP members and other organizations**

A number of tangible joint efforts among participating organizations emerged as a result of the CoP. One of the most noteworthy and one which involved the majority of participants was centered on the grassroots organization Neighborhood Partnership Network’s project with the Louisiana Children’s Museum, a traditional nonprofit organization. The Network partnered with the Museum for a release party of the parent edition of the Network’s newspaper, *The Trumpet* (of which 5,000 copies were printed and distributed).

*The Trumpet Release Party Family Fest* was attended by over 300 people including parents, children and other community supporters. The Network reported that the CoP partners “*was an invaluable asset*” in this effort:

*“The majority of the (CoP) organizations contributed articles about their work, wrote articles on behalf of their parent participants, or connected parents so that they could share their own ideas. The assistance and collaborations from all these organizations and their staffs was crucial in the completion of this issue. It also added tremendously to the diversity of perspectives that were represented in The Trumpet, which (the Network) alone would probably not have been able to achieve. Furthermore, several of the members of the cohort wrote articles, not as staff members of their respective organizations, but as parents themselves. We were particularly glad to offer this opportunity, because it highlighted the goal of allowing mothers and fathers to be Parents First.*”

*All the organizations that contributed to The Trumpet were invited out to celebrate the publication and seeing their words in print. They invited their networks of parents to enjoy dinner, a sense of community, and the many interactive exhibits at the Children’s Museum. The official invitees to the LCM’s Family Fest were the families of TCA’s Head Start. In addition there were parent representatives from OPEN, Urban League, Birthing Project, and Puentes New Orleans. All those organizations, plus Planned Parenthood and three other organizations, each had a table at the event. Parents and guests crowded around these tables to learn about resources that are available in the city. We received highly positive feedback from parents and providers alike about this event.”*

Other examples of improved coordination include:

- A joint endeavor which brought the Orleans Public Education Network together with the Ready, Set, Go Advisory Council, in partnership with United Way of Southeast Louisiana and other (non-CoP) community entities to develop New Orleans’ first ever Born Learning Trail. The interactive trail features games and activities for children and parents that are designed to help develop young children in the five domains of school readiness: physical health and well being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development; and communication and general knowledge.
- A series of “listening sessions” was organized by a collaborative of Healthy Start, the Birthing Project and Planned Parenthood to identify key issues for parents.

- One CoP member with a small staff reported, *“We don’t have a Spanish-speaking person and being able to call Puentes who can translate for us...has been beneficial.”*

Participants also observed the power of learning together and building relationships:

- *“It’s like our Community of Practice is modeling the behavior we should see in our parents.”*
- *“It’s our internal partnerships that have opened the process but we have also been able to have our external partnerships grow. When I say ‘external,’ I mean outside of the Stand Up group...it’s pretty much led to five other partnerships outside of this group.”*
- *“I feel like our success is mutually-invested or mutually-intertwined. That’s why I care about not only to get what we have set out to get done, but that I care about the success that our partners and collaborators have in this body of work. How do we find a way to win together? I think that is definitely something that has come out of the work.”*

Other cross-fertilization activities also occurred. A parent working with CoP member, the Birthing Project, applied to the Parent Leadership Training Institute, and a CoP member who works for Planned Parenthood also applied to the training institute. Additionally, Louisiana Children’s Museum parent enrolled in Educare on her own accord (Kingsley House/Educare is a new CoP member organization).

## **2) Increased sharing of promising practices of parent engagement with other organizations**

Almost all CoP participants (92.3%) report learning new practices around engaging parents as a result of their interactions with other CoP members (See **Table 1a** below). And most participants (84.6%) also report an increased knowledge of design and implementation of evaluation processes (See **Table 1b** below).

<b>As a result of my interactions with fellow CoP members I have...</b>		
<b>Learned new practices around engaging parents</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Yes	92.3%	12
No	7.7%	1

**Table 1a: Less than 8% of respondents indicated they did not learn new practices around engaging parents as a result of their interaction with fellow CoP members.**

N=13

As a result of my interactions with fellow CoP members I have...		
Increased knowledge of design and implementation of evaluation processes		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	84.6%	11
No	15.4%	2

**Table 1b: A majority of those surveyed indicated they increased knowledge of design and implementation of design process as a result of their interaction with fellow CoP members.**  
N=13

Fewer participants (46.2%), however, reported improved skills around social media usage (See **Table 1c** below).

As a result of my interactions with fellow CoP members I have...		
Improved skills around social media usage		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	46.2%	6
No	53.8%	7

**Table 1c: 53.8% of respondents indicated that they did not have improved social media skills as a result of their interaction with fellow CoP members.**  
N=13

One CoP participant commented on this new way of working together: *“The web is in fact wider. There is a deeper understanding about what organizations do and therefore more connectivity, not a forced connectivity inside of a timeframe for a grant period. I think that we’re one step closer as a group to being able to think about the impact that we have as a collective impact – meaning we’ve got common language and common goals and we’re measuring ourselves against this common outcome.”*

### **3) Seeking each other out for support and problem solving**

A majority of CoP participants (84.6%) state they have problem solved around program implementation as a result of interaction with other members (See **Table 1d** below).

As a result of my interactions with fellow CoP members I have...		
...Problem solved around program implementation		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	84.6%	11
No	15.4%	2

**Table 1d: 11 of the 13 CoP members indicated that they problem solved around program implementation as a result of their interaction with fellow CoP members.**

N=13

One of the CoP members remarked on the challenges as well as the benefits of this kind of new work: *“It’s just refreshing...to be able to come to the table and say, ‘We don’t know what we’re doing’ or ‘We’ve gotta figure this out. How can we put together all of our minds to try and figure this out’ and we’ve been evolving. I think the down side to that is that things are just a lot slower, and it takes a lot more time. But the upside is that you get to do work that is a lot more intentional and purposeful.”*

Another participant acknowledged that CoP participation has *“really pushed me, encouraged me to push back on our (organization’s) approach to parent engagement and advocacy....which has been really burdensome, overwhelming and a huge task. I’m glad this grant is helping us to do it. It’s really challenging us on how do we engage clients, especially as advocates.”*

Another member shared that they *“did not expect the number of vulnerabilities that I would see in our group and the number of solutions that I would also get of it.”*

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Maintain the Community of Practice as the key venue to continue building capacity of organizational members and participating staff around program planning and implementation, evaluation, best practice, parent engagement, advocacy, and related content issues to Stand Up.
- Strengthen the impact of the CoP by more strongly encouraging regular participation of key decision makers, and exploring with participants what they need to further drive change inside their organizations.
- Formalize the learning and sharing functions of CoP by considering how information can be more effectively documented and shared among members and with the larger community. Explore how to connect CoP members' work and leverage greater long-term impact.
- Immediately initiate fine-tuning of the Year Two evaluation.
- Increase the scope of parental involvement in the Year Two evaluation.
- Begin planning internal GNOF conversations and the CoP about how to maintain the spirit and impact of Stand Up beyond the conclusion of the current funding period.

### **About this Evaluation**

Nia K. Davis of Purposeful Solutions, LLC was contracted to assist with the consulting process and provide evaluation services for the overall Stand Up initiative.

Purposeful Solutions, LLC is a distinctive, hands-on consulting and training firm. The mission of is Purposeful Solutions, LLC is “Guiding your organization from ideas to results.” The firm meets the accountability, evaluation, research, training and planning needs of organizations, social service agencies and philanthropic foundations.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

1. Stand Up For Our Children Logic Model
2. Community of Practice Survey Instrument
3. Parents Survey Instrument
4. Community of Practice Focus Group Questions
5. Parents Focus Group Guide
6. Parent Meetings Observation Protocols
7. Community of Practice Meeting Agendas
8. News Clipping: Total Community Action



## Attachment 1 – Stand Up For Our Children Logic Model

		<b>Short Term</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>	<b>Long Term</b>
Parent Outcomes	A. Increased personal sense of agency among parent advocates	<i>-Increased awareness of civics and democratic processes (S)</i>  <i>-Increased awareness of parent rights (S, FG)</i>	<i>-Increased advocacy of parents on behalf of children (S, FG)</i>  <i>-Increased confidence to serve as parent leaders (S, O, FG)</i>  <i>-Increased skill acquisition (S, O, FG)</i>	<i>-Parents organize for policy change</i>  <i>-Parents organize to improve weights outcomes, readiness to learn for children ages 0-5 and family economic security</i>
	B. Increased understanding and use of key data	<i>-Increased awareness of data like EDI, census and others &amp; usage (S, FG)</i>	<i>Increased usage of data like EDI, census and others to support their advocacy (S, FG)</i>	
	C. Further development of early childhood and parent/families , community organizing and advocacy alliances and coalitions	<i>-Increased sharing of information with other parents (S, O, FG)</i>	<i>-Parents connecting with other organizations within the Community of Practice and other organizations (S, FG)</i>	

		<b>Short Term</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>	<b>Long Term</b>
Organizational Outcomes	A. Increased organizational capacity of non profits engaged in funded Stand Up work	<i>-Increased awareness of importance of parent voice (S, O, FG)</i>  <i>-Increased skill acquisition (S)</i>	<i>-Increased adoption of organizational activities centered around civic/democratic practices (S, FG)</i>  <i>- Changes in organizational culture/policies/procedures influenced by participation in</i>	<i>-Parents Set priorities for organizational activities</i>

			<i>Community of Practice (S, FG)</i>  <i>-Changes in organizational culture/policies/procedures influenced by parent leaders (S, FG)</i>	<i>-Organization operates from a civics focus to support parent efforts</i>
	B. Increased understanding and use of key data	<i>-Increased awareness of data like EDI, census and others (S, FG)</i>	<i>-Usage of data like EDI, census and others &amp; usage in setting an organizational agenda (S, FG)</i>	
	C. Further development of early childhood and parent/families , community organizing and advocacy alliances and coalitions	<i>-Increased sharing of promising practices of parent engagement with other organizations (S, O, FG)</i>  <i>-Improved coordination among Community of Practice and other organizations (S, O, FG)</i>  <i>-Seeking each other out for support and problem solving (S, O, FG)</i>	<i>-Increased collaboration/partnership with other agencies to address parent engagement (S, O, FG)</i>	
	D. Increased use and implementation of promising/evidence based practices in engaging parents/families	<i>-Increased inclusion of promising/evidence based practices in engaging parents/families (S, O, FG)</i>	<i>-Increased inclusion of parents shaping organizational activities (S, FG)</i>	

**Attachment 2 – Community of Practice Survey Instrument**  
**Stand Up Community of Practice Member Survey**

**Please read the questions below carefully and answer as honestly as you can. There are no right and wrong answers. We’re interested in learning more about your experience as a participant in the Stand Up Community of Practice.**

**First we’d like to know more about you and the role you serve within your organization...**

1. How would you define your role within your agency/organization?  
                     Program Staff                      Decision Maker                      Other? \_\_\_\_\_
2. When thinking about your experience prior to your work on Stand Up, How would you define your level of experience with engaging parents as leaders?  
                     Very Experience                      Some Experience                      Little or No Experience
3. Approximately how many Stand Up Community of Practice meetings have you attended? \_\_\_\_\_

**Please share how your participation in Stand Up Community of Practice Meetings and consultations has affected you. For each of the following statements, please indicate if it has **Increased**, **Decreased** or if there has been **No Change**.**

<b>How has your participation in Stand Up Community of Practice meetings and/or consultations affected the following:</b>	<b>Increased</b>	<b>Decreased</b>	<b>No Change</b>
My awareness of the importance of parent voice			
My awareness of data like EDI, census and others			
My knowledge of the concerns of parents regarding their children			
My use and implementation of promising/evidence based practices/tools for engaging parents			

When it comes to the skills introduced during Stand Up Meetings how has participating in Stand Up Community of Practice Meetings affected your capacity. For each of the following statements, please indicate if it has **Increased**, **Decreased** or if there has been **No Change**.

<b>How has your participation in Stand Up Community of Practice meetings and/or consultations affected your capacity in the following:</b>	<b>Increased</b>	<b>Decreased</b>	<b>No Change</b>
Curriculum Development			
Parent Recruitment Strategies			
Negotiating and Managing partnerships			
Program Planning			
Program Implementation			
Evaluation			
Logic Model Development			
Engaging Parents Meaningfully			
Sharing Resources			

**Please share how your participation in Stand Up Community of Practice Meetings and consultations has affected your organization.** For each of the following statements, please indicate if it has **Increased**, **Decreased** or if there has been **No Change**.

<b>How has your participation in Stand Up Community of Practice meetings and/or consultations affected the following for your agency/organization:</b>	<b>Increased</b>	<b>Decreased</b>	<b>No Change</b>
The influence parents have on organizational policies and procedures			
Your organization's utilization of a civics based approach to parent engagement			
Usage of data like EDI, census or others to frame the organization's agenda/activities			

**Please think about your interactions with your fellow Community of Practice members, when asking this next set of questions.**

How, if at all, have you benefited from the opportunity to problem solve with fellow Stand Up grantees during Community of Practice meetings?

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What other interactions have you had with fellow Stand Up grantees outside of the Community of Practice meetings? (Problems solving, sharing resources, etc)

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**Lastly, please provide feedback on your overall experience as a Stand Up grantee.**

What has been your biggest challenge in your implementation of your Stand Up work?

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What should GNOF do differently to improve future implementations of Stand Up?

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Additional comments or suggestions:

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## Attachment 3 – Parent Survey Instrument

### Parent Survey

**Please read the questions below carefully and answer as honestly as you can. There are no right and wrong answers. We're interested in learning more about your experience as a participant in parent leadership meetings.**

**First we'd like to know a little bit about you...**

Name of Parent group \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

What's your gender? (circle one)      MALE      FEMALE

What is your race/ethnicity?    African American/Black      Asian      Caucasian/White  
Latino/Hispanic      Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Children ages 0-5 in home \_\_\_\_\_

**Please share how your participation in parent group meetings has affected the way you see *yourself and your role in your family*...**

For each of the following statements, please indicate if it has **Increased**, **Decreased** or if there has been **No Change**.

<b>How has your participation in parent groups meetings affected the following:</b>	<b>Increased</b>	<b>Decreased</b>	<b>No Change</b>
My understanding that it is my right as a parent to be actively involved in issues that affect my child(ren)			
My ability to see myself as a leader			
Knowing I can make a difference in my community			
My ability to influence community members to take action on important issues			
Feeling driven to be a leader			
Feeling personal responsibility to participate in community projects			
My confidence in myself			
My understanding of the democratic process			
My knowledge of data related to children			
My knowledge and skills in bringing about change			
My ability to influence decisions that affect my child			
My confidence in my ability to connect with other parents			
My sharing of information about programs and resources with other parents			
My ability to influence decisions that affect my family			



**Next, share how your participation in parent group meetings has affected the way you see *your role in your neighborhood and community...***

For each of the following statements, please indicate if it has **Increased, Decreased** or if there has been **No Change**.

<b>How has your participation in parent groups meetings affected the following:</b>	<b>Increased</b>	<b>Decreased</b>	<b>No Change</b>
My ability to influence decisions that affect my neighborhood			
Knowing I have the ability to change things I don't like about my community			
My motivation to be involved in my community			
My desire to be active in my community			
My ability to access information to help me better navigate my community			
My ability to influence decisions that affect children in my community			
My ability to interpret data and information on children in my community			
My understanding that it is my right as a parent to be actively involved in issues that affect the children in my community			
My ability to influence decisions that affect my community			

**Lastly, we're interested in your experience in the parent group meetings...**

What do you remember the most about the parent group meetings you attended?

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Would you recommend and encourage other parents to participate in parent group meetings like this?  
Why or why not?

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**THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO ANSWER THE SURVEY!!**

## Attachment 4 – Community of Practice Focus Group Questions

### Opening Comments:

Thanks for agreeing to participate in our focus group today. You have been invited to participate in a conversation about your experience as a grantee with GNOF's Stand Up for Our Children initiative. GNOF is very interested in gaining a better understanding of the process and outcomes of the Stand Up For Our Children initiative from your perspective. What you share with me will be used for evaluation purposes ONLY. This is a confidential process, meaning your real name or identifying information will not be shared with anyone. Only fake names and descriptors will be used. You can pass on any question and may leave our group conversation at any time. The recording device and note taking that you see will only be used for my purposes of capturing your responses to these questions. The final report will not have any names nor will what has been said here be attributed to any specific person. To this end, I invite your MOST candid responses during our conversation today. I'll be happy to answer any questions you may have about this process now and if you have any additional questions later on.

I appreciate your willingness to participate in this interview. Let's begin...

When answering these questions, I'd like you to think about your experience regarding your participation in the Stand Up supported activities.

The first set of questions is directed towards your interaction with the parents you engaged through Stand Up.

1. To provide greater context for this conversation, please give a brief overview of how you have engaged parents through Stand Up? (Probe: as a group attending several sessions as part of a programs, individually, etc)
2. Since becoming a Stand Up supported organization, what changes in knowledge around the concerns parents have regarding their children? \*Joann this speaks to Organizational Outcome A regarding skill acquisition. We previously agreed that there greater ability to meet parents where they are would be considered a skill increase\*
3. Think about the parents with whom you have/are working with in your Stand Up funded activities. How has their sense of agency around advocacy increased over the last year? Probe: increased acquisition of skills, increased awareness around their parental rights, examples of advocacy, use and understanding of data, sharing information with other parents, etc.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> set of questions asks about the changes, if any, that your organization has undergone as a result of your Stand Up Supported work.

4. How has participation in this Community of Practice influenced/impacted the way your organizations views/responds to parents? [Probe: with increased awareness of importance of parent voice; Any changes to organizational culture, policies or procedures?
5. What promising practices, evidence based practices, tools, processes that you were exposed to in Community of Practice have been used in your organization? [Probe: practices around parents and families, other organizational tools (evaluation, social media, curriculum, etc) ]
6. Have you developed any partnerships, alliances and coalitions as a result of your participation in Stand Up Community of Practice meetings and activities? If so, can you share more about this? [Probe: increased sharing of information with other orgs; increased collaborations and partnerships with other agencies in Community of Practice to address parent engagement and advocacy?]

This last set of questions focus on your experience as a Stand Up grantee and relevant lessons from your grantee experience.

7. What unexpected or unintended outcomes have emerged from your Stand Up work?
8. What changes, if any, would you suggest GNOF make in future implementations of Stand Up? [Probe: Consultation? Community of Practice? ]
9. What lessons from your Stand Up experience of either engaging parents or participating in meetings/activities will be helpful for GNOF and how they approach supporting this community and the organizations with whom it supports?
10. Are there any additional comments that you'd like to make?

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION**

## **Attachment 5 – Parent Focus Group Guide**

### **Parent Semi Structured Focus Group Guide**

#### Opening Comments:

Hello, I'm Nia K. Davis and I am a contract or with the Greater New Orleans Foundation. You have been invited to participate in a conversation about your experience as a parent group participant. I would like to get a better understanding of your experience in these parent group meetings, the activities you participated in and what you think you have achieved a result of your participation. What you share with me will be used for research purposes. This is a confidential process, meaning your real name or identifying information will not be shared with anyone. Only fake names and descriptors will be used. You can pass on any question at any time. I'll be happy to answer any questions you may have about this process now and if you have any additional questions later on. I appreciate your willingness to participate in this discussion today.

1. Thinking back to your experience in your parent group meetings, what differences have you noticed within yourself?
2. What new skills have you learned through participation in parent group meetings?
3. Since participating in parent group meetings, what things do you know do or think about differently?
4. How has participating in these parent group meetings affected how you interact with people or organizations that provide services to your children?
5. How has participating in parent group meetings affected how you view data related to children in your community?
6. What about your rights as citizens and parents...How has participating in parent group meetings increased your understanding of your rights as parents and citizens in this community?
7. For the final question as we move to wrap up this focus group, is there anything else you would like to add regarding our discussion?

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION**

## Attachment 6 – Parent Meeting Observation Protocols

### Parent Observation Guide

*Focus of this event/meeting/gathering?*

*Issues raised in conversation or discussion?*

*Parent Activities*

Tasks

Roles

*Parents collaborating and sharing information/knowledge/resources?*

*Parents learning/acquiring new skills?*

**Field Notes:**

## Attachment 7 – Community of Practice Meeting Agendas

### *Stand Up For Our Children*

### *Learning Community Agenda*

*October 11, 2012*

**Location:** Greater New Orleans Foundation, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Main Conference Room, 1025 St Charles Ave

- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| 8:15 – 8:30  | Breakfast available  |
| 8:30 – 10:00 | Welcome to the Stand Up Learning Community – Joann Ricci<br>Opening and Round Robin Introductions<br>Overview of the Learning Community Approach and Learning Objectives<br>Working Agreements |
| 10:00-11:30  | Sharing Our Work -- Pam Stevens<br>Sharing the Basics: project goals, strategies and partners.<br>Identifying Start-up Questions and Challenges<br>Commonalities and Priorities                |
| 11:30-11:40  | Lunch – We will have box lunches available for a working lunch.  |
| 11:40-12:50  | Learning Framework – Nia Davis<br>Using Evaluation to Document our Successes<br>Plans for Data Collection and Assessment<br>Applying our Learning  |
| 12:50-1:00   | Planning for Our Next Meeting<br>Check Out   |

*Stand Up For Our Children*  
*Learning Community Agenda*  
*December 6, 2012*

**Location:** Greater New Orleans Foundation, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Main Conference Room, 1025 St Charles Ave

- |              |   |
|--------------|---|
| 8:15 – 8:30  | Breakfast available   |
| 8:30 – 10:00 | Welcome– Pam Stevens<br>Check In/Program Updates<br>Follow Up on Documents<br>Cooperative Learning Groups<br>Additional Assistance                |
| 8:50-9:30    | Parent Power Video – Flint Mitchell   |
| 9:30-11:45   | Developing Your Stand Up Success Story – Nia Davis<br>Review of Team Success Story<br>Logic Model Development<br>Evaluating Your Stand Up Program |
| 11:45-12:30  | Working Lunch<br>Parent Engagement and Recruitment Strategies – Pam Stevens   |
| 12:30-12:45  | Document Sharing Demonstration on Wiggio – Nia Davis  |
| 12:45-1:00   | Check Out<br>Next Steps   |



*Stand Up For Our Children*  
*Learning Community Agenda*  
*January 31, 2013*

**Location:** Greater New Orleans Foundation, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Main Conference Room, 1025 St Charles Ave

8:15 – 8:30	Breakfast available
8:30 – 9:30	Success Stories and Logic Model Updates
9:30—10:00	Context and Challenges for Parent Leadership
10:00-10:30	Role Play on Parent Leadership
10:30-11:00	Visioning A True Partnership
11:00-11:45	Values of Parent Leadership
11:45-12:15	Lunch
12:15-12:45	Authentic Parent Engagement
12:45-12:50	What Keeps Parent Engagement Alive?
12:50-1:00	Key Learning and Next Steps

*Stand Up For Our Children*  
*Learning Community Agenda*  
*March 7, 2013*

**Location:** Greater New Orleans Foundation, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Main Conference Room, 1025 St Charles Ave

8:15 – 8:30	Breakfast
8:30 – 8:45	Opening Check In – Pam Stevens
8:45-9:15	Setting the Scene – Joann Ricci/Flint Mitchell
9:15-9:30	Q&A from Grantees – Deirdre Johnson Burel
9:30-10:00	Charting Our Progress at 6 Months – Pam Stevens
10:00-10:30	Values of Parent Leadership
10:30-10:45	Debrief
10:45-11:45	Sharing Our Experience
11:45-12:15	What Have We Learned
12:15-12:45	Lunch Break
12:45-1:00	Check Out and Plans for May Meeting

*Stand Up For Our Children*  
*Learning Community Agenda*  
*May 9, 2013*

Location: Greater New Orleans Foundation, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Main Conference Room, 1025 St Charles Ave

- Welcome and Check In 8:30 am
- Agenda Review, Working Agreements and 4 Questions 8:35 am
- Updates from Social Media Learning and Mapping folks 8:40 am
- World Café--an interconnecting conversation about your work 9:00 am
- A Look at Evaluation 10:45 am
- Lunch 12:15 pm
- Next Steps conversation (Grants 2014, Design Team invitation, 12:45 pm

**AGENDA**  
**STAND UP FOR OUR CHILDREN**  
**JUNE 13, 2013 COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE MEETING**

8:30-10:00 FOCUS GROUP 1

10:15-1:00 LEARNING COMMUNITY MEETING

10:15-10:30 Opening Check in (D'Yuanna and Pam)

Confirm that all grantees have received the grant application for Year 2 and acknowledge that more information may be needed.

Options for answering questions:

- 1) Does anyone have "big" questions about the application?
- 2) Let's put a list of those on the sheet and if we can immediately answer, Joann and Flint will do so
- 3) If anyone wants to stay for 15 minutes at the end of today's learning community meeting, Joann and Flint will answer questions then.
- 4) Organizations can set up time to talk to Joann and Flint at a later date.
- 5) If interested, we can set up a group conference call for a later date.

10:30-10:45 Receiving help from others (Pam and D'Yuanna)

What topics/questions/issues can we address as a learning community today? We have a couple of topics that came up in the last survey: evaluation and advocacy.

Options for learning from each other:

- 1) At lunch we will have small group discussions on a few topics we select. What should these be and who will take the lead?
- 2) What topics might be the focus of our July meeting? We may need more time than we have today; we may need to prepare for the discussion and may want to continue this topic at another time.
- 3) Now that we have topics for today, can we hone in on a few specifics?
- 4) Example: evaluation discussion may include defining short term outcomes, reviewing logic model outcomes, tools others have tried, when to use

formative or process evaluation and when to use outcome/impact evaluations.

- 5) For advocacy: Do we need simultaneous activities-awareness, education, mobilization? How do we work individually and as a collective? How do we mobilize the parents that we all represent or work with?

10:45-11:30          Social Media (Jenny, Julia)

- 1) Social media video (7 minutes)
- 2) Small group discussions: incorporating social media tactics in your work
- 3) Large group discussion: signing on to use Facebook and Twitter
- 4) The Trumpet: an opportunity to frame the family and parent strategy for publication, grantee articles for the August issue to showcase work, are there specific messages to promote?

11:30-12:15          Resource mapping (Deirdre, Julia)

- 1) Review the mapping tool (it is on Wiggi): is the terminology and categories reflective of parent engagement work?
- 2) Organization teams will complete the Moving Trains form together
- 3) Discussion: how can we use this information? For what purposes and what audiences? Where should the information be housed?

12:15-12:25          Set up for Lunch (D'Yuanna, Pam)  
Break into table topics from opening discussion  
Examples:    Nia and Flint -- evaluation techniques  
                 D'Yuanna --developing advocacy strategies

12:25-12:50          Lunch Discussions

12:50-1:00          Evaluations and Closing Comments

1:15-2:45          Focus Group 2 (Nia)

1:15-2:00          Debrief Meeting with Design Team

**AGENDA**  
**STAND UP FOR OUR CHILDREN**  
**JULY 18, 2013 COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE MEETING**

- 8:00-8:30    **BREAKFAST**  
Take a Look Around (Exhibit)
- 8:30-9:00    **CAFE A GO GO (Leandra and Pam)**  
What are you looking forward to next year?  
What has the COP meant to you as a practitioner?  
What has changed in the relationship between your organization and parents?
- 9:00-9:35    **WHAT IS NEW IN OUR WORLDS? (Flint)**  
OPEN: Update on EDI and PLTI  
Puentes: Jefferson Parish Partnership  
Open mic for others to share
- 9:35-9:45    **Break/Eval Team set up**
- 9:45-10:45   **EVALUATION MAKES THE WORLD GO ROUND (Nia, D'Yuanna, Joann)**  
What surprised you or piqued your interest about the themes?  
How do these results resonate or match your experience this year?  
Anything you've experienced that is different?  
What additional resources or information would you add or share?
- 10:45-11:30 **MAPPING OUR WORLDS (Julia and Pam)**  
What can we see in these charts?  
What are our priorities for further analysis?
- 11:30-12:30 **CELEBRATING OUR SUCCESS WITH FOOD**
- 12:30-12:50 **CONNECTING OUR WORLDS (Leandra and Kellie)**
- 12:50-1:00   **LOOKING FORWARD**

# Inside the Nation's Biggest Experiment in School Choice

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By

STEPHANIE BANCHERO

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Sept. 29, 2013 10:39 p.m. ET

NEW ORLEANS—Kenisha Nelson tried to walk her son Kaleb into his new elementary school, Akili Academy, but the third-grader slipped from her hand and bolted to the front door. "I got this, mom," he said.

[Enlarge Image](#)



Kenisha Nelson reviewed homework with her son Kaleb, who started at Akili Academy this year for third grade. His previous school, Benjamin E.Mays, was closed for failing to meet state testing goals. Ms. Nelson started working in February to choose a new school for Kaleb. *William Widmer for The Wall Street Journal*

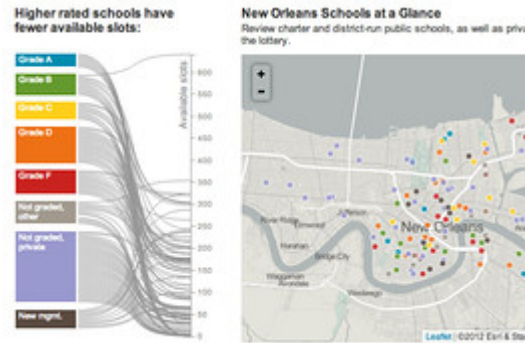
The first day of school turned out to be the easiest leg of Ms. Nelson's journey through the nation's largest experiment in school choice. She had searched since winter for the best campus with open spots for her 8-year-old son and 14-year-old daughter.

## News Clipping: Total Community Action

### An Education in School Choice in New Orleans

See information on all public schools in New Orleans plus the private schools that participate in the lottery.

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In the end, she said, "it was a great outcome and worth missing those days at work and running around to schools to find good ones."

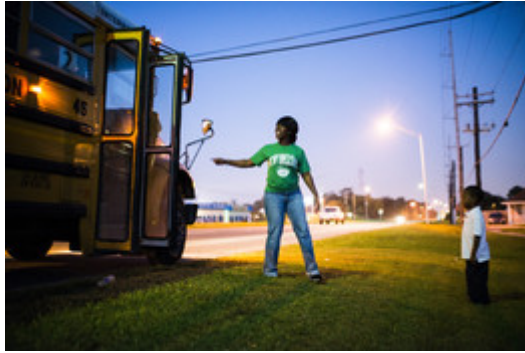
There is broad acknowledgment that local schools are performing better since Hurricane Katrina washed away New Orleans' failing public education system and state authorities took control of many campuses here.

Graduation rates went to 78% last year from 52% before Katrina—surpassing Detroit, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and Oakland, Calif., cities also struggling to boost achievement among lower-income students. The share of New Orleans students proficient in math, reading, science and social studies increased to 58% in 2012 from 35% before the 2005 storm, state data shows.

School officials now want to ramp up improvements, saying the city's education marketplace still needs work. The enrollment system is complicated. There are far fewer available seats at good schools than at poor ones, leaving many families to choose between bad and worse. And few students can get into top-rated schools because of limited seats and strict admissions policies.

[Enlarge Image](#)





Kenisha Nelson stands with her son Kyler, right, after putting Kaleb on the bus in New Orleans at the beginning of the school year. *Rush Jagoe for The Wall Street Journal*

Boosters, including Republican Gov. Bobby Jindal, say New Orleans points to the future of public education. Giving parents a choice of schools, they say, fosters competition that weeds out badly run campuses. Academically, New Orleans is improving faster than any school district in Louisiana.

"I think the devastation of Katrina brought a lot of eyes to New Orleans and it brought in a lot of new people who want to make changes and do the right thing for our kids," said Leslie Hunter, whose son and daughter attend high school here. "It might not be perfect, but at least people are finally trying to do something to make it better."

Many parents say it takes extra effort to find an acceptable campus. "If parents want a good school for their kids," said Ms. Nelson, a 36-year-old single mother, "they have to take a stand and do all the work themselves."

Leslie Jacobs, a businesswoman who served on the state board of education and helped guide the schools overhaul, said New Orleans has built a foundation for better schools since the hurricane. "Now we are entering into phase two, where we need to build a more sophisticated model," she said. "The next few years will be the bigger push up the hill."

[Enlarge Image](#)



Ava Howard, 28, right, rested with her four children at the annual Schools Expo held in the Superdome in February, where parents can learn about enrollment options. *Tim Hussin for The Wall Street Journal*

State Schools Superintendent John White, who arrived in Louisiana two years ago, supports the idea of public education as a marketplace but said the New Orleans system had lacked order. "Government needs to be here for equity of resources, equity of access and equity of outcomes," said the 37-year-old former executive of Teach for America and former deputy chancellor of New York City Schools.

Most of the city's schools were failing long before Katrina destroyed dozens of campuses. The storm killed at least 1,800 people and displaced about 65,000 students, mostly low-income African Americans.

The Orleans Parish School Board fired its teachers after the storm, and the state board of education took control of all but the 13 best schools, which remain under the local board.

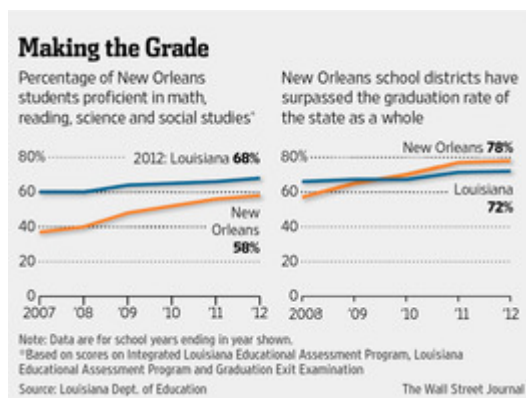
The state converted most of the campuses into charter schools, which hired their own nonunion teachers. Today, more than a quarter of the instructors are from Teach for America, a national teacher training program that recruits college graduates from around the U.S.

Since Katrina, the average teacher salary in New Orleans has risen slower than the state average but in 2011 was 20% higher than before the storm: \$47,878 compared with the statewide average of \$49,246, state data shows.

New Orleans, which previously spent about the same as other Louisiana districts, tallied about \$13,000 per pupil in 2011, compared with the state spending average of \$11,000 that year, according to state data. The city spent \$8,000 per pupil before Katrina, records show.

Denver, Chicago and Cleveland have embraced school choice on a smaller scale, but none give as much freedom—to parents and campuses—as New Orleans does: About 84% of its 42,000 public school students attend charters, the largest share of any district in the U.S.

[Enlarge Image](#)



Charter schools are largely free to manage their own budgets and hiring, set curriculum and schedules, and select textbooks. The lowest performing schools are eventually closed by state officials or replaced with new operators.

For the school year that started in August, parents picked among 78 charter schools, as well as eight traditional campuses, one independent school with a board appointed by the governor and 38 private schools that are paid with state-issued tuition vouchers. To help guide the selection, public schools are issued grades of A to F, based on academic performance.

Despite the city's rapidly improving student test scores, most schools are still far from earning top ratings, limiting parent choices.

Of the nearly 12,300 slots available in the citywide lottery for this school year, 20% were in schools rated F in 2012, 29% in D schools, 11% in C schools, 14% in B schools and none in A schools, according to an analysis by The Wall Street Journal. Among the open seats were ungraded schools that previously had D and F ratings but recently changed operators.

Complicating results in the education marketplace, some families haven't used their choices as expected: Nearly 35% of the approximately 6,700 students applying to transfer or enroll at a public school for the fall semester selected either D- or F-graded schools as their first pick, the Journal found.

For New Orleans parents, the school-choice system adds a level of involvement well beyond getting children dressed, fed and out the door in time. In applying for a new school, many families take into account such factors as the distance from home and work, where siblings are enrolled, the availability of after-school care and campus safety, in addition to academic ratings.

Jennifer Nin's 8-year-old son has already attended three schools, looking for the best educational fit. He now attends Akili Academy of New Orleans, where, Ms. Nin said, he is "thriving and loving it" after two years at less-than-desirable schools.

"I like knowing that I have the freedom to decide where my son goes to school," Ms. Nin said. "It gives me the power to pick something better for him."

Parents are empowered to vote with their feet, though it can be a slow and rocky path, with thousands of children spending a year or more at F schools.

Nika Burns this spring decided to keep her two sons at a school that carried an F grade last school year, even though there were higher-rated schools closer to home. Her children objected to a move, she said, because "they feel loved and nurtured and cared for" at William J. Fischer Accelerated Academy. She also worried about the boys keeping up academically at another campus.

Ms. Burns' daughter, on the other hand, was accepted at a B-graded high school. "It's not just about pulling kids out of F schools and moving them around," she said. "You have to think about what's best for the child."

The application process is made more complicated because parents don't know the number of open seats expected at schools each year. Parents earlier this year made selections not knowing, for example, that only three 3rd-grade seats were open at B-rated schools in the lottery for fall.

Luck also plays a role in the schools marketplace. Student applications are randomly assigned a number that helps determine admissions in rank order.

None of New Orleans' eight A-rated schools—all charter schools under the control of the local school board—participated in the citywide lottery. The board voted last year to force the charters into participating when their licenses come up for renewal, which for some is as long as a decade away.

Aesha Rasheed, a community activist who created a popular school guide explaining admission requirements, said that after Katrina, parents were "put in charge of their children's education and sent out to navigate a complex system where not all schools played fair."

For Ms. Nelson, the quest began in February, at the annual Schools Expo held in the Superdome. Ms. Nelson, who lost her husband four years ago in a homicide,

needed to find schools for two of her three children. "It's so overwhelming," she said, moving through the crowd past display tables.

Authorities were closing the school where her son Kaleb attended—the F-rated Benjamin E. Mays—for repeatedly failing to meet state testing goals. Ms. Nelson also needed a high school for her daughter, Kaylan, who was entering ninth grade. Her youngest son was in preschool.

The pressure triggered nightmares, Ms. Nelson said, of her daughter landing at a violent school and her son stuck in the principal's office for hyperactivity. Ms. Nelson moved Kaleb to the Mays charter school three years ago, she said, because his kinetic nature didn't mesh with his previous charter school's strict discipline.

Kaleb, who earned A's in second grade at Mays, said teachers there let him take short "brain breaks," to play basketball or help in the principal's office, when he got antsy.

Ms. Nelson applied to five schools for Kaleb and three for Kaylan. The citywide application allows for as many as eight schools per student. New Orleans parents apply to three, on average. Ms. Nelson said she selected only the schools she wanted.

Of the 21 public high schools in the lottery, just six were rated above D. Kaylan Nelson applied to one B-rated high school and one C-rated, competing with more than 1,400 eighth-graders for 150 open 9th-grade seats at the two campuses.

For Kaleb, Ms. Nelson selected Benjamin Franklin Elementary Math and Science, a B-rated school. But the choice was doomed from the start. Though Ms. Nelson didn't know it, Franklin had no openings for 3rd-grade. Her other four choices were a C-rated charter and three private schools.

In May, Kaleb was assigned to his second choice, Upperroom Bible Church Academy, a private school. Ms. Nelson said she liked the school when her daughter had briefly attended before Katrina. But just 21% of voucher students passed state exams last school year at Upperroom.

Later in May, Ms. Nelson was notified that Upperroom was barred from accepting new voucher students because of the school's poor exam results. In July, Kaleb was in the next round of the lottery and Ms. Nelson selected Akili Academy, a C-rated charter school that officials said had openings in third grade.

Ms. Nelson learned in July, a month before school started, that her son was admitted. After his first day, Kaleb's teacher phoned Ms. Nelson to say the boy was smart and attentive. "I nearly cried with relief," she said.

Initially, Ms. Nelson's daughter didn't get into either school she had selected in the lottery. In spring, Ms. Nelson made several visits to McDonogh 35 High School, a storied campus that was the first public high school in Louisiana for African Americans, pushing school officials to enroll her daughter. It holds a C grade. In July, she learned a slot opened for her daughter.

State officials say they are working to bring better order to the marketplace, opening "family resource centers" to help parents navigate the choice system, for example. Mr. White initiated the citywide lottery system two years ago.

This year, for the first time, the lottery incorporated private schools that accept state vouchers. A few high-rated public schools run by the local board also participated for the first time but dropped out after the first round, returning to a selection process controlled by individual principals. School board officials said those schools would return to the lottery next year.

Kathy Riedlinger, chief executive of the Lusher Charter School—which is under local board authority—said the campus doesn't participate in the lottery because the centralized admissions system usurps school autonomy. Lusher, located a few blocks from Tulane and Loyola universities on the east bank of the Mississippi River, has the highest ranked K-12 program in the state.

On a school day last semester, a class of third-graders stroked violins and cellos as their music teacher led them on a baby grand piano. They were in a new \$2 million arts wing, named for the Bill Goldring family, whose foundation donated \$500,000 to help build the center. Mr. Goldring is chairman of the Sazerac Co., one of the largest distilling companies in the U.S.

School officials say its success comes from an active parents group, a veteran teaching staff and a rich curriculum. Its demographics are also unique: Citywide, 88% of students are African-American and 83% are low-income; a third of Lusher's students are black, and a fifth are low-income.

Lusher gives admissions priority to children who live in the neighborhood, have siblings at the school or have a parent who works at Tulane.

Other students, including those from outside the neighborhood, must take an admissions exam and enter a campus lottery for the remaining seats. This year, 1,336 of these students applied for 152 open seats, officials said.

Many parents have complained they have little chance to enroll their children in Lusher or other A-rated schools. They say the schools erect barriers in what is supposed to be an open marketplace.

Ms. Riedlinger said her school's selection process was fair and that it was "a major distraction to keep fighting over who gets into Lusher. The question should be: Why can't we create more like Lusher."